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ABSTRACT

The evaluation report describes the Student Training at Retail Stores (STARS) Project in New York City. The program's mission was to develop and implement a three-semester program of intense occupational, vocational, and career education to enhance job skills and secure retail sales jobs for high school juniors with mild learning, speech, emotional, or intellectual disabilities. In 1988-89 Project STARS served 106 students at seven high schools. Project evaluation indicated that Project STARS satisfactorily implemented four activity areas: teacher training, curriculum development, classroom instruction, and workshops. Evaluation also indicated that 74% of students rated all STARS activities very favorably, particularly the practical preparation for job interviews, for finding and retaining jobs, and the psychological preparation such as increasing self confidence. Project STARS teachers identified the same program aspects as most successful. More than 94% of the students reported that their level of knowledge and self-esteem had been positively affected and 38% of the students reported that they had acquired jobs. Among recommendations are setting aside a class period for Project STARS workshops at the beginning of the semester and making time available for Project STARS teachers to follow up on students at job sites. (DB)

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OREA Report

Evaluation Section Report

PROJECT STARS

1988-89

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EVALUATION SECTION REPORT

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December 1989

Evaluation Section Report

PROJECT STARS

1988-89

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PROJECT STARS
1988-89

SUMMARY

The Student Training at Retail Stores (STARS) Project was funded by the U.S. Department of Education and administered by the Division of High School's Special Education Operations Unit. The program's mission was to develop and implement a three-semester program (January 1989 through June 1990) of intense occupational, vocational, and career education with the collaboration of local businesses and the Board of Education. The purpose of Project STARS was to enhance job skills and to secure retail sales jobs for high school juniors with mild learning, speech, emotional, or intellectual disabilities. In 1988-89 Project STARS served 106 students at seven high schools.

The Office of Research, Evaluation, and Assessment (OREA) evaluated the 1988-89 program. Findings show that Project STARS satisfactorily implemented four activity areas: teacher training, curriculum development, classroom instruction, and workshops. However, classes did not start at the beginning of the semester. Consequently, students' had already scheduled their classes and STARS classes could not be scheduled to accommodate them. Teachers responded to this problem by meeting with students individually or in small groups.

OREA findings showed that 74 percent of the students rated all STARS activities very favorably, particularly the practical preparation for job interviews, for finding and retaining jobs, and the psychological preparation such as increasing self-confidence and feelings of self-worth. Project STARS teachers agreed with the students' assessment of activities and singled out the same aspects of the program to praise.

The outcomes were positive: more than 94 percent of the students reported that their level of knowledge and self-esteem had been positively affected by all program activities. About 38 percent of the students reported they had acquired jobs; one-third of these had done so without the school's assistance. OREA found that students who acquired jobs independently considered Project STARS to be more useful than did students who found their jobs through the school. However, students who found their jobs through the school had a higher level of job satisfaction than those who found their jobs independently. This difference may have been due to the ability of school personnel to arrange for higher-level jobs and to match jobs with students. This outcome supports the decision of Project STARS staff to combine its instructional role with assisting students to find employment.

Based on these findings, OREA makes the following recommendations.

- Arrange for more speakers, seminars, trips, films and instructional materials.
- Set aside a class period for Project STARS workshops at the beginning of the school semester.
- Make time available for Project STARS teachers to follow up on students at job sites.

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I. INTRODUCTION

PROGRAM BACKGROUND

The Student Training at Retail Stores (STARS) Project was primarily funded by the U.S. Department of Education and was administered by the Division of High School's Special Education Operations Unit. The program's mission was to develop and implement a three-semester program (January 1989 through June 1990) of intensive occupational, vocational, and career education with the collaboration of a local business and Board of Education (B.O.E.) representatives. The purpose of Project STARS was to foster and enhance the employability skills of the target population and place them in entry-level retail sales jobs. The target population consisted of special education high school juniors with mild learning, speech, emotional, or intellectual disabilities who were enrolled in an occupational or vocational education program leading to a diploma. The STARS project was to be implemented at six public high schools (five academic-comprehensive and one vocational-technical) located in a New York City borough. A total of 120 special education students, twenty from each school, were to be selected for participation.

PROGRAM OBJECTIVES

The Special Education Operations Unit set the following program objectives to be met by the end of the project period (July 31, 1990).

- Seventy percent of the students who have completed the program will secure full or part-time employment and/or submit applications to continue their education.

- STARS staff will contribute to the development of workshops and supporting materials that prepare students for entry level positions in the retail merchandising field.

- Seventy percent of students who have completed the program will score significantly higher on a locally-developed pre-/post- test designed to measure knowledge of employability skills.

- Seventy percent of students who complete the program will demonstrate statistically significant growth in their job-related personal development as measured by a locally-developed pre-/post-employment attitude questionnaire.

PROGRAM ACTIVITIES

Project STARS consisted of four major program activities: classroom instruction, workshop participation, curriculum development, and student employment.

Classroom instruction consisted of an occupational education series that met five times a week for a total of 80 sessions each term. STARS students were expected to fulfill the requirements of their regular academic program along with those of the project.

Project STARS staff, in cooperation with a major department store, developed a series of workshops conducted by representatives from the store. This series was videotaped to establish a permanent record. The schedule of workshops was the following: Spring 1989 - attendance and punctuality, proper dress and makeup, communications skills, and interviewing; Fall 1989 - loss prevention, customer service, selling techniques, and sales equipment; Spring 1990 - safety, retail merchandising, human relations, and quality control.

To make workshops more effective, occupational education teachers developed curriculum materials to enrich these experiences. Teachers prepared the students to participate in these workshops and developed post workshop follow-up activities. STARS staff developed complementary units of study to enrich the cooperative education curriculum already being offered and included topics such as: self-awareness in relation to the job market, office telephone techniques, expressing job needs appropriately, effective listening, reading between the lines, body language, decision-making,

discrimination and the law, the job search, and positive attitudes for keeping a job. The project director used these materials to compile a teachers' guide to be used in future program cycles.

The STARS design included a sequence of student employment activities during the three semesters of the project's existence: In the spring and summer of 1989 during the students' junior year, the school teacher-coordinator helped place students in part-time jobs after school or on weekends and in summer jobs. Teacher-coordinators visited work sites and offered assistance to students during the summer segment of the program. They also spoke to work supervisors to assess the work experience of the students and identify and help solve any problems which might have arisen. During the fall and spring of their senior year, students would be placed in cooperative education work experience programs in which they would attend school for one week and work full-time during alternate weeks.

PROGRAM STAFFING

STARS was staffed by one project director and one teacher-coordinator at each school. The project director was based at the Board of Education and was responsible for the overall administration of project activities including providing training and consultation to the school-based teacher-coordinators, arranging the development of curriculum guides and videotapes, and being responsible for the distribution and collection of OREA data. Teacher-coordinators were responsible for: providing classroom instruction to students, visiting work sites to consult with supervisors and assist students to optimize their on-the-job learning experiences, and working with the STARS director to develop the curriculum guide.

REPORT FORMAT

This report presents OREA's evaluation of Project STARS' spring 1989 program. The report is organized as follows: the evaluation methodology is described in Chapter II, evaluation findings are presented in Chapter III, and OREA's conclusions and recommendations are discussed in Chapter IV.

II. EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

OREA evaluated the process and perceived quality of program implementation and evaluated three program outcomes. OREA addressed the following questions.

Program Implementation

- How were students selected for the program?
- What percentage of teachers received training and how did they rate it?
- What was the frequency and content of communication between project teachers and students' other teachers?
- What percentage of teachers had access to the project curriculum and how did they rate it?
- What were the activities and topics covered and how did participants rate them?
- How did students and teacher-coordinators rate program quality and what improvements did they recommend?

Program Outcomes

- What impact did the program activities have on students' level of knowledge and self-esteem?
- What percentage of students obtained jobs and how useful did they perceive the program to be? What was their level of job satisfaction?

SAMPLE

Project STARS was implemented at seven school sites. An extra site was added to the six sites originally proposed because staff members from that site were very enthusiastic about the program and requested that their school be included. OREA planned to survey the full population of students (106) and teacher-coordinators (seven).

DATA COLLECTION

OREA provided the project director with survey forms for all students and teacher-coordinators in May of the program year. The program coordinator collected the surveys and forwarded them to OREA at the end of June. OREA received data on five of the seven teacher-coordinators (71.4 percent) and 52 of the 106 students (49 percent). All data presented in this study are based on these responses.

DATA ANALYSIS

To answer specific evaluation questions, OREA aggregated data, tallied responses, and calculated the frequencies. To answer program implementation questions, OREA only used responses that were produced by at least 10 percent of the respondents.

III. EVALUATION FINDINGS

OREA's evaluation of Project STARS addressed program implementation (student selection criteria, teacher training, teacher communication, curriculum utilization, classroom instruction, workshops, and perceived program quality) and program outcomes (change in level of knowledge, self-esteem, and student employment).

PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION

The High School Special Education Operations Unit of the New York City Board of Education implemented Project STARS during the spring of 1989. It served approximately 106 high school special education students at seven sites in one of the city's boroughs. Although originally designed to operate at six sites, the program added another site because staff members from that site were very enthusiastic about the program and requested that their school be included. The program was staffed by one project coordinator and seven teacher-coordinators, one in each school.

Student Selection Criteria

OREA asked teachers to identify the criteria used to establish student eligibility for participation in the program. OREA found that eligibility was based on the student's attitude, level of maturity, ability to communicate, capacity to be responsible and punctual, grade level (tenth, eleventh, or twelfth grade), age, attendance, grades, desire, and willingness to work. Students who lacked direction or were considered potential dropouts were also considered for the program. In describing the process of selecting students for the program, project teachers reported that they had interviewed prospective student participants and had met with the students' parents, advisors, and teachers.

Teacher Training and Communication

Four out of the five teacher-coordinators who responded to OREA's survey reported that they had received training. All four of these respondents reported that the training was excellent and completely appropriate to the program goals.

OREA asked teacher-coordinators about their communication with their students' other teachers. Three out of the five respondents reported that they had contact with the other teachers in the form of discussions, training sessions and general meetings. Respondents reported that the following topics were covered: student attendance at workshops, general program issues, and course content. Respondents also reported that they and students' other teachers had jointly participated in monthly seminars and general meetings. Two respondents reported that they had met on a weekly basis with other teachers, one on a monthly basis and one on a daily basis. Three of the four respondents reported that the interaction was of average or superior quality.

Curriculum Development and Utilization

Project staff developed four curriculum drafts: attendance and punctuality, dress and makeup, communications skills, and interviewing. All five teacher-coordinators who responded to OREA's survey reported that the curriculum had been made available to them. Four of the five respondents considered that the curriculum was appropriate to the students involved in the program and all five of them reported that the curriculum was very relevant to the program goals.

Classroom Instruction

Project STARS classes were held daily and totaled 80 sessions during the spring semester. Classes did not start at the beginning of the semester. As a result, student's

schedules were already set and consequently STARS classes could not be scheduled to accommodate students. Teachers dealt with this problem by meeting with students on an individual or small group basis. OREA asked teacher-coordinators to identify the type of instructional activities that took place in the project sessions. They were: role playing, lectures, and reading exercises. Topics covered in the sessions were: grooming and appropriate attire, health care, attendance and punctuality, job applications, on-the-job situations, communications skills, stealing, and paychecks. Respondents reported that classroom activities were specifically designed to help students develop the following special skills: interviewing and conversation skills, a sense of responsibility and punctuality at work, applying for jobs, basic math and english skills, developing self-esteem, dress and grooming, handling paychecks and benefits, and job safety.

Workshops/Seminars

Project STARS organized 15 workshops or seminars during the spring semester. OREA asked teacher-coordinators to identify the activities conducted through these workshops. They were: role-playing, discussions, question and answer sessions with professionals in the retail business, hair and grooming sessions, and videotaped sessions of interviews.

Participants' Perceptions of Program Quality

Student-Participants' Perceptions.* Of the 52 students who responded to OREA's survey, more than 74 percent of them rated all STARS activities and topics as "excellent" in quality (see Table 1). Additionally, no more than two percent of student-respondents

*Survey data in this section is presented only for those responses which were produced by at least ten percent of the respondents and in descending order of response frequency.

Table 1

Quality of Activities as Reported by Students

(In Percent)

Student Ratings	Classroom		Workshop	
	Topics	Activities	Topics	Activities
Excellent	76.9 (40)	75.0 (39)	76.0 (38)	74.5 (38)
Average	23.1 (12)	25.0 (13)	22.0 (11)	23.6 (12)
Poor	0.0 (0)	0.0 (0)	2.0 (1)	2.0 (1)
Total[a] (N)	(52)	(52)	(50)	(51)

Source: OREA-developed Student Survey, Spring 1989

[a] Totals vary because of missing data on individual items.

- *More than 74 percent of respondents rated all activities and topics as "excellent" in quality.*
- *No more than two percent of respondents rated any activities or topics as "poor" in quality.*

rated any activities or topics covered by STARS as "poor" in quality. These findings show that all activities and topics selected by program personnel were very much on target as far as student participants were concerned.

OREA asked student-participants to identify the most positive aspects of Project STARS. About 22 percent of student-respondents stated that the preparation for interviewing and what they learned about getting and keeping jobs was very positive. More than 19 percent reported that the project had helped them acquire more confidence about work, that their sense of self-worth had improved and that in general they had learned a lot from the project. More than 19 percent of the respondents reported that the subjects covered in class and in meetings were very valuable. More than 17 percent of respondents were very pleased with the films, tapes, trips and food provided by the project. More than 14 percent of respondents thought that the assistance the project offered in finding jobs and the opportunity to earn money were very positive aspects of the program. Finally more than 14 percent of the respondents reported that learning about proper grooming and dress for interviews and work was very valuable. When OREA asked students to identify the negative aspects of the project, very few responded. However, nine out of the 52 students who filled out a survey said that the project had been boring, repetitive, and too long.

When OREA asked students to identify ways of improving the program they made the following suggestions: more than 37 percent of the respondents requested more speakers, meetings, activities, films, and trips; 25 percent of the respondents suggested that the program involve more students, have larger classes, and be expanded to all schools; 12 percent suggested that there be on-campus job recruitment and interviews; and finally, 12 percent suggested that there be higher wages.

From the above findings OREA concludes that student-participants were very positive about many aspects of project STARS, particularly the practical preparation for interviewing, finding and retaining jobs, and the psychological aspects of the program such as increasing self confidence and feelings of self worth.

Teacher-Coordinators' Perceptions. STARS teacher-coordinators identified the following positive aspects of the project: it prepared the students for success in the work world and helped them develop new skills; it increased students' self esteem and provided them with support and encouragement; it gave students early work experience and improved the likelihood of their being employed after graduation; the seminars and content covered in the classes were very appropriate; the program generated students' interest and was effective in motivating them; the program introduced students to people in the business world who might be useful in the future.

Although half of the teacher-coordinators responding to OREA's survey thought that the program had no weaknesses, others did identify some problematic aspects. Because the program started somewhat late, students had to be taken out of other classes which were already in progress and consequently lost class time. Other problems they identified were: student involvement was lacking in training sessions; project sessions were too few in number; and finally, the project director was not available as often as teachers needed her. This was, no doubt, a consequence of a temporary gap in the coverage of this key staff role due to a serious illness.

From the above findings OREA concludes that project teacher-coordinators seemed to be in full agreement with student- participants in that they too perceived many very positive aspects of project STARS, particularly the practical preparation for work

and the psychological benefits of the program -- increasing students' self-esteem and providing them with support and encouragement.

OREA asked project teachers-coordinators to identify ways to improve the program. Respondents suggested: a class period be formally set aside for Project STARS sessions; that the project should have more materials such as workbooks and exercise sheets; there should be more seminars dealing with on-the-job issues; and finally, teachers should have more time to follow up on students at job sites.

PROGRAM OUTCOMES

OREA's evaluation of program outcomes consisted of measuring the project's effect on students' level of knowledge and self-esteem. In addition, OREA presented information on student employment: the number of jobs acquired by students, the degree to which they perceived the program as useful in the process of acquiring jobs, and their level of job satisfaction.

Table 2 provides information on the effects of the project's classroom instruction and workshop activities on students' level of knowledge and self-esteem. Students were asked if they had learned anything new in each of their activities. They were given a six point Likert scale which ranged from "nothing" to "a lot." To measure self-esteem, students rated how each of the activities made them feel about themselves. Possible responses ranged from "very bad" to "very good." OREA found that more than 94 percent of respondents reported that their level of knowledge and their self-esteem had been positively affected by all Project STARS activities. In fact, more than 78 percent of student-respondents reported that their level of knowledge and their self-esteem were very positively affected by all Project STARS activities.

Table 2

Effects of Activities on
Level of Knowledge and Self-Esteem as Reported
by Students

(In Percent)

Level of Knowledge or Self-Esteem	ACTIVITIES			
	Instruction		Workshops	
	Knowledge	Self-Esteem	Knowledge	Self-Esteem
High	84.3 (43)	84.0 (42)	78.4 (40)	80.0 (40)
Medium	9.8 (5)	12.0 (6)	19.6 (10)	14.0 (7)
Low	5.9 (3)	4.0 (2)	2.0 (1)	6.0 (3)
Total[a] (N)	(51)	(50)	(51)	(50)

Source: OREA-developed student survey, Spring 1989

[a]Totals vary because of missing data on individual items.

- *More than 94 percent of respondents reported that their level of knowledge and their self-esteem had been positively affected by all activities.*
- *More than 78 percent of respondents reported that their level of knowledge and their self-esteem were very positively affected by all activities.*

Table 3 presents data on student employment. About 38 percent of the students (20 out of 52) for whom data was available reported that they had acquired jobs. OREA compared the responses of students who had acquired jobs independently and those who had done so through their school with regard to their level of job satisfaction and their sense of how useful the program had been. OREA found that about one-third of the students who acquired jobs did so independently. OREA also found that more than 88 percent of the students who acquired jobs through their school and more than 99 percent of students who found their jobs independently found Project STARS moderately or highly useful.

Finally, more than 70 percent of students who found their jobs through their school and 33 percent of students who found their jobs independently reported that they were highly satisfied with their jobs. Thus, although students who found their jobs independently perceived the program as more useful than those who found their jobs through the school, the latter group had a higher level of job satisfaction than did the former. This finding demonstrates that the jobs that students got through the mediation of the school were, in fact more satisfying. The explanation may be that school personnel were more capable of securing higher-level jobs or jobs that were better matched to the individual student. These findings support the project's decision to combine its instructional role with that of assisting students to find employment.

Table 3

Job Satisfaction and Program Usefulness for
as Reported by Students with Jobs

(In Percent)

Level of Job Satisfaction and Program Usefulness	STUDENTS WHO FOUND JOBS					
	Independently		Through School		Totals	
	Job Satis-faction	Program Use-fulness	Job Satis-faction	Program Use-fulness	Job Satis-faction	Program Use-fulness
High	75.0 (3)	33.0 (1)	76.9 (10)	70.6 (12)	76.5 (13)	65.0 (13)
Moderate	0.0 (0)	66.7 (2)	15.4 (2)	17.6 (3)	11.8 (2)	25.0 (5)
Low	25.0 (1)	0 (0)	7.7 (1)	11.8 (1)	11.8 (4)	10.0 (2)
Total[a] (N)	(4)	(3)	(13)	(2)	(19)	(20)

Source: OREA-developed student survey, Spring 1989

[a]Totals vary because of missing data on individual items.

- *Out of 52 students for whom data was available, a total of 20 acquired jobs.*
- *About one-third of the students who acquired jobs did so independently.*
- *More than 88 percent of the students who acquired jobs through their school and more than 99 percent of students who found their jobs independently found the program moderately or highly useful.*
- *More than 70 percent of students who found their jobs through their school and 33 percent of students who found their jobs independently reported that they were highly satisfied with their jobs.*

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The High School Special Education Operations Unit of the New York City Board of Education implemented Project STARS during the spring of 1989. It served approximately 106 high school special education students at seven sites in one of the city's boroughs. Originally the program was designed to operate at six sites. However, another site was added because staff members from that site were very enthusiastic about the program and requested that their school be included. The program was staffed by one project coordinator and seven teacher-coordinators, one in each school.

The program satisfactorily implemented four activity areas: teacher training, curriculum development, classroom instruction, and workshops. However, classes did not start at the beginning of the semester. As a result, student schedules were already set and STARS classes could not be scheduled to accommodate students. Teachers dealt with this problem by meeting with students on an individual or small group basis.

OREA's findings showed that student-participants were very positive about many aspects of Project STARS, particularly the practical preparation for interviewing, finding and retaining jobs and the psychological aspects of the program such as increasing self-confidence and feelings of self-worth. More than 74 percent of student-respondents rated all STARS activities and topics as "excellent" in quality. OREA also found that project teachers seemed to be in full agreement with student participants in that they too perceived similar positive aspects of Project STARS, particularly the practical preparation for work and the psychological benefits of the program -- increasing students' self-esteem and providing them with support and encouragement.

When OREA asked students to identify ways of improving the program they made the following suggestions: provide more speakers, meetings, activities, films, and trips;

involve more students, have larger classes, and expand to all schools; provide on-campus job recruitment and interviews; and finally, arrange for higher wages. Teacher-respondents made the following suggestions: formally set aside a class period for Project STARS sessions; provide more materials; more seminars; and more time to follow up on students at job sites.

With regard to program outcomes, OREA found that more than 94 percent of student-respondents reported that their level of knowledge and their self-esteem had been positively affected by all program activities. With regard to actual employment, about 38 percent of the student-respondents reported that they had acquired jobs; one-third of these had done so without the school's assistance. OREA also found that students who acquired jobs independently considered that Project STARS was more useful than did students who found their jobs through their school. However, students who found their jobs through their school had a higher level of job satisfaction than did those who did so independently. It may have been that school personnel were better able to arrange for higher-level jobs and were more able to match appropriate jobs with individual students. This outcome supports the project's decision to combine its instructional role with that of assisting students to find employment.

Based on the above discussion, OREA makes the following recommendations.

- Arrange for more speakers, seminars, trips, films and instructional materials.
- Set aside a class period for Project STARS workshops at the beginning of the school semester.
- Make time available for Project STARS teachers to follow up on students at job sites.